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EDUCATION AND BELIEF.

BY REV. J. SALWEY, JUNIOR.

It is with the greatest diffidence that in obedience to the wishes of your Hon. Sec., and in fulfilment of a promise rashly given, and since repented of, I address you this evening. I have launched out on a sea of unknown breadth and depth with a lamentably poorly equipped vessel, for my life is, alas, too busy to allow me much time for reading!

However, I see in your prospectus that among the central principles to which all branches of your Society are committed, are these: that a religious basis be maintained; and that education is to be dealt with under not only its physical, mental and moral, but also under its spiritual aspect. Here you will notice is a declaration in favour of discussing the question of religious education, and that in its deepest and truest sense, the spiritual side of religion.

Here, it seems, is something to do with the work of a Christian Minister, and an opportunity which ought to be seized; and though I am aware that some of you possibly hold views divergent from my own, you will, I feel sure, permit me to say something about education and belief from the Christian point of view. It seems, too, that much that can be said upon the necessity for a close connection between education and belief, is by no means to be confined to any one of the Christian bodies of thought, but should equally

be felt by men and women with any belief whatsoever, even by those who profess to have no belief, but who, if they really believe that they have no belief! surely, if honest, owe it to their children to teach them their own reasons for so thinking.

Historically the connection between education and belief is of the closest character. In fact it is true that education and belief have marched hand in hand down the history of the past. The greatest specimens of the literature of the world are those of men who, however false their theories, yet were groping after God, or believers in divine and supreme beings, one or more. The centres of faith have been the centres of education, as, for instance, the schools of the Prophets, the Jewish temple, the Monasteries, and Ecclesiastical Communities of mediæval days; the Universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge, and the Church of England as the founders of our national education. Such men as Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul, Luke, Augustine, Ven. Bede, Chaucer, Bacon, Shakespeare, Baxter, Browning, Tennyson, Milton, Cowper, shew the place that men of faith have had in the education of mankind. And my point is illustrated by such revivals of faith as the Reformation, so closely connected with a revival of education and knowledge that it is difficult to say whether belief revived education or education revived belief, though, for my part, I give the title of honour to belief.

Hand-in-hand belief and education have made a stately progress: each revival of religion has been accompanied by a revival of education. Sometimes believers have sought to check education where they thought it was leaving the lines of faith, as in the case of the persecution of Galileo; sometimes educationalists have tried by a kind of matricide to slay the religious faith which has spent itself in spreading light and education through the world. One hundred years ago Voltaire thought the Bible a dead book, but still the Bible lives, with a larger circulation, and a larger influence than ever before in the history of the world, and still education and science are to the fore in those countries where the Bible is read—Great Britain, Protestant Germany, America; and in other countries in which the Bible is less read, but which are Christian; countries professing faith; countries whose national history is the history of the struggles of faith: in these, too, we find that education holds an honourable

place. The birth of science, the growth of science, the discoveries of science have chiefly, if not entirely, taken place in those countries which are the abodes of faith; and though nowadays we are told by many that science is opposed to faith—that the child of science finds the home of faith too narrow for his life—I refuse to believe it to be a necessary or natural thing; for it is in the countries of faith that science grows and thrives, and many of the noblest in the ranks of science are Christians, while few indeed of the leaders of science deny the existence of a supreme being and cause.*

So close in the past was the connection between education and belief—what is the present state of affairs?

The people of our land are by no means, on the whole, irreligious. They would by the vast majority express a belief in God: they are for the most part baptized, married and buried by the ministrations of their pastors, but how few appear to know why they hold their faith or why they attach a certain importance to this or that doctrine; how few have any intelligent reasons for their belief. The faith still exists, but it is obscured and ignorant, because it has not been educated.

In moving about among people—and in looking at life from the point of view of one whose office is to teach what are to me, however imperfectly I may be able to express them, Divine realities and truths, I have been struck by the ignorance to be found on all sides about spiritual things, an ignorance which is remarkable in a so-called Christian and religious land, and which is to a believer appalling.

Again, how great is the indifference of many to the practical duties of the faith they profess, not merely in regard to church attendance, be the church Christian or otherwise, but also in regard to the practical exhibition of the working out of their faith in political life, in the duties of the citizen, in the problems of the present day—such as gambling, intemperance, vice; or such as labour questions, housing of the poor, health, and so forth.

Viewing this from the human point of view, how sad is this ignorance, how lamentable its results upon our modern

* For a proof of this statement, see a remarkable pamphlet by the Rev. G. T. Manley, M.A., late Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and Senior Wrangler in 1893, *The Views of Modern Science*, published by Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, E.C.

life. How earnest we should be in seeking to combat this ignorance and indifference in ourselves and in others. Viewing this from the Christian point of view, which is essentially human in its care for the present needs of man, but yet looks beyond this life to eternity, and views this life as the time of preparation and probation for a new and fuller life beyond, in the presence of God—how infinitely more sad is this lack of intelligent faith. What are the causes of this ignorance in the case of a nominally, and I believe at the bottom, a really religious nation?

Perhaps it may be answered that this condition of affairs is due to the failure of the religious systems in the present light and knowledge—that there is no belief worth believing, and that the old systems are worn out or have been tried and found wanting. The answer to the objection is I think that it does not hold, in that men and women of faith are those who have been and are still doing the most for the world in every branch of life, and that in even those branches of science which are supposed by some to be opposed to religious faith we have on the side of faith many of the greatest. Witness for instance such names as Kepler and Newton, Sir W. Thomson, Sir George Stokes, Herschel, Faraday, Lord Lister, Lord Kelvin, &c.

One of the chief causes for the present-day ignorance on matters of faith is that parents do not educate their children either by direct teaching or by practical example in such matters.

There is real cause to fear that in countless homes the simplest facts of religion are never the subject of enquiry or conversation, much less of instruction. There is reason to believe that the ignorance about religion is prodigious. Among the upper classes, so-called, there is often I fear more ignorance than among the working classes. It was a noticeable fact in my time at Oxford, that many who did well in other branches of study were "ploughed" in the examination on scripture knowledge. The working classes get in the National Schools and Board Schools regular historical and moral teaching, and constantly spiritual teaching. For them, too, the Sunday School, in spite of the poverty of the teaching power, is a real help towards spiritual knowledge. But in all classes the parents seem to have sadly neglected

the spiritual education of the child, and for the upper classes there is no Sunday School as a rule. The Bible, which has been the basis of English literature and law and life, the spread of which has been concurrent with the greatness of our nation, is not so much studied from its spiritual side, however much it may be crammed for examination.

But why, one asks, do not parents educate the faith of their children?

(1) One answer is perhaps because they have no faith of their own. Of course, if parents have no religious convictions they cannot impart any. But this in the vast majority of cases is not the true answer.

(2) In some cases the true answer is to be found in the pressure of life. The father leaves in the morning before the children are up, and returns when they are in bed; the poor mother is like Martha, cumbered about with much business.

(3) In other cases the answer to our question is to be found in the pure indifference of the parents. So long as the child does not get in the way of their work or pleasures; so long as it is dressed in a way worthy of their station in life, or the position they aim at; so long as it is being educated for earning money if a boy, or getting married if a girl; then such parents are satisfied.

(4) In another case the answer to our question will be that the parent is too shy; a spirit of reserve prevents him from speaking to his boy, or her from speaking to her girl, about sin, about moral dangers, about the end and purpose of life, about belief in a God of love and mercy and grace.

(5) "I leave that to be done at school," another will say, and so for one reason or another the child passes through its most impressionable years, years of moral and spiritual crisis, without any real caution or encouragement from him or her who should certainly be the one to give it, and who probably is most interested in the children's well-being, who certainly is responsible in the sight of God.

But what about the school? Surely the child will learn there, one says. Well, first of all one has to ask this question, Is it right that the more solemn responsibilities of the parent should be left to others? And secondly, what chance has the teacher of drawing out and educating the faith of the child,

when on its return home it finds father and mother possessed of a dumb spirit on such matters?

Again, one wonders how many parents enquire what is the teaching on matters of faith, and what is the spiritual tone of the school they have in view for their child. They are anxious as to who teaches the music or the drill, but about the spiritual tone of the school there is not half so much enquiry, it is to be feared, as about its social standing. And if the impossibility of ascertaining such facts is pleaded as an excuse, we fall back upon the foundation truth that the parents' supreme duty is to educate the child in questions of belief.

(6) But perhaps the true reason is to be found in a complaint of Mr. Herbert Spencer. Dress, he says, has been developed out of the love of decoration. Savages who would not hesitate to walk out without a scrap of clothing would never think of going out without their paint or bracelets, or, as Capt. Speke narrates of his African attendants, they strutted about in their goat-skin mantles when it was fine, but went about shivering in the rain without them. It is curious, says Mr. Spencer, that the like relations hold with the mind. Among mental as among bodily acquisitions, the ornamental comes before the useful; not only in times past but in our own era as much, that knowledge which conduces to personal well-being has been postponed to that which brings applause. Our children are taught not so much for work, parentage, or citizenship, but for applause. To quote Mr. Spencer again, "Not what knowledge is of most real worth is the consideration, but what will bring most applause, honour, respect." Education, he says in another place, should be for these things and in this order—(1) For self-preservation; (2) securing a living; (3) rearing a family; (4) citizenship; (5) for recreation or pleasure.

Mr. Spencer omits to dwell on the spiritual side of education, or to speak of the need of education in view of eternity, but surely we may accept his statements and extend them a step further and say that one of the chief causes of the ignorance in matters of faith is that that knowledge which conduces to personal well-being has been postponed to that which brings applause. The world thinks little of religious faith; nay, it has a strong objection to it if it causes the believer to run

contrary to the current of popular opinion or action, and so the question of belief is neglected.

But when I plead for a close relationship between education and belief, I do not plead for that kind of education purely dogmatic, which says, "Believe! and ask no questions." Protestantism has claimed and won for us the right of private judgment, and we must educate the child to use its own reason and judgment in matters of faith. Matters of faith are not to be forced into the child's mind, but the child's faith is to be appealed to on lines of reason. I fancy, however, that I hear someone say—(1) that the child is naturally without faith; it is born an atheist; and (2) were it not for the influences surrounding its childhood it would remain an atheist all its life; and (3) that it would be better for children to be brought up without religion, leaving them to decide for themselves in later life. To this I reply, even if the infant has no knowledge of God, this does not prove that God does not exist, and that the child should not be taught of His existence. You do not leave the child in historical or geographical or moral ignorance; why leave it in spiritual ignorance?

I believe, too, that the natural healthy child has religious instincts and natural faith as the most precious of its heritages, and that, in spite of its hereditary tendencies to wrong. That just as it has power of speech, understanding, colour, love, so it has power of belief, and that power should be as carefully and systematically educated and trained as its mental and physical powers, and I believe that it is as possible to stunt a child's spiritual development as its physical and moral development, and that an atheist is not only a possible person, but a natural and inevitable outcome of much of the education, or lack of education of the present day, and that just as if you were to tie up a child's arm and never allow it to use it, it would not only fail to develop, but would wither, so it may be with the child's spiritual capacity for belief.

Most men by far, even in the savage tribes of the earth, develop a belief in a supreme being. Is not this as likely to show that the child was born with an instinct of faith as say a poet is born a poet, or an artist born an artist? There is an increasing conformity in education to the methods of Nature, and an abandonment of forcing. Thus there is a

spreading opinion that the rise of an appetite for any kind of information implies that the unfolding mind of the child has become fit to assimilate it. What then about the child's questions as to its existence, its future, or the natural phenomena of wind and rain, or the origin of the world, and its first cause? What about those deep and searching questions of the little child? Do they not betoken an instinct of faith, and are they not to be answered? And if you answer them as many a Christian mother and father has and does, how beautiful in its simplicity, directness and power is the faith of that little one, and how much in later life we long for it. Truly "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

If you leave the children alone, they will not leave you alone: there are evidences of belief all round them in life, and you will have to answer their deep and searching questions. But why not leave the children to decide for themselves in later life? Well, they will always do that; and meantime you must help them, as far as you can, to make a right decision when the time comes; and meantime you must supply them with the facts they need for their infant life.

A spiritual training will be the safeguard of the child in its early days. How many a thoughtless boy at school has been kept straight by the thought of his mother's prayers, and by the teaching of that Bible which she packed with his clothes when he left home. To borrow and adapt an illustration:—

When a ship is sent to sea, provisions of every kind and meats of every description are placed on board; but if they forget to put salt on board to preserve the meats, they will soon become a mass of putrefaction. It is all very well to say there is plenty of salt in the sea: let the sailor pick it up as he needs it; but that is not what you do. Now the spiritual side of education is the salt: it will render the whole cargo of knowledge wholesome. We must not say that the child on the voyage of life will be surrounded by belief, let him pick up what he needs. We do not say this of geography or music or drawing, we stuff it into the poor child even if it has no particular aptitude for it. Let us then plant and cultivate Faith in the child's mind, for Nature abhors a vacuum; if you do not till your ground and plant the good seeds, weeds will grow, and later on you will have to eradicate them.

The spiritual teaching of early life is the salt of the cargo of knowledge which you place in the child's mind as it starts on the voyage of life; and when the battered vessel is entering into port, the haven of rest, it is the salt that is still wholesome, and if anything else is wholesome it will be due to the salt. From my visits to many death-beds as a parochial Clergyman and as a hospital Chaplain, I have found that the soft spot has been the memory of a mother's teaching, and the hymns and prayers learned in childhood. And so I believe that failure to teach the child about God and His love, about sin and the atonement for it, about eternal life, about the power of God which that child may claim in all its temptations and trials in life through Christ, is to deprive the child of one of its most sacred rights of knowledge, to handicap it for the race of life, and to deprive it of its great protection and aid to resistance against evil without and within. And to give the child this aid, we who are parents have a solemn responsibility cast upon us which we can pass on to no nurse or teacher, although we can ask them to aid.

It is our duty to gain by study and prayer an intelligent grasp of the character and proportion of the truth of God, and, above all, to have a personal testimony to give our children as to the grounds of our faith. We ought to be able, as Paul said to Timothy, to say to our children (whatever our faith may be), "I know in whom I have believed."